DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 856 CG 016 723

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TITLE A Manual for the Operant-Interpersonal Approach to Pre-Marital Counseling.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 29p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Communication Skills; *Counseling Techniques; Counseling Theories; *Expectation; Foreign Countries; Group Counseling; *Interpersonal Competence; Interpersonal Relationship; *Marriage; Mate Selection
IDENTIFIERS Nova Scotia; *Premarital Counseling

ABSTRACT

This manual presents a pre-marital counseling program based on the premise that marital conflict can result from incomplete or inaccurate communication about basic attitudes and expectations. Problems and limitations of studies on pre-marital counseling are reviewed, and a six-session course designed for use in a small group setting or with individuals is described. A format is presented for each session in which the leader demonstrates appropriate behavior, couples try the behavior in an experimental exercise, group discussion follows, and homework assignments are given to facilitate transfer of training. Specific activities, designed to develop positive relationships based on the reciprocity of specific positive behaviors, are outlined. The manual also includes copies of the Unrevealed Differences Test, a worksheet of shared and private goals, a sexual attitudes questionnaire, a marriage contract worksheet, and a course evaluation form. A model of successful and unsuccessful divisions of decision-making authority is also included. (JAC)

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ED230856

A Manual for the Operant-Interpersonal Approach to Pre-Marital Counseling

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Halifax, Nova Scotia

1982

CG 016723

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Although the divorce rate is increasing, it is also true that a smaller percentage of the population than ever before remain single, that is, do not marry at any time during their lives. As well, the average length of time a divorced person remains single before remarrying is decreasing (Olson, 1972, p. 383). This evidence does not support the popular contention of the demise of the institution of marriage in our society. A better explanation of the above evidence is not that people are dissatisfied with the institution of marriage, but that they end up being dissatisfied with their own particular marriage, and consequently divorce.

Two possible reasons for the high divorce rate are:

1. People enter into marriage with unreasonably high expectations and become frustrated.
2. They lack the skills necessary to make their expectations explicit and to negotiate and compromise their mutual expectations vis a vis their partners.

One approach to the problem of troubled marriages has been an increased interest in marital treatment (Olson, 1970; [illegible], 1971, 1973; Azrin et al., 1973; Stuart, 1973; and Weiss, Hops, and Patterson 1973). An alternate approach to this problem is premarital counselling. The importance of premarital counselling has been emphasized by Burgess and Locke (1960), Dicks (1966), Rutledge (1966), Bader (1974), and Stuart (1974).

A review of the literature, however, has indicated that few articles have been written on the topic of pre-marital counselling.

Most of the articles that have been written are brief summary descriptions and suffer from at least one of the following problems:

1) Only a few studies relate pre-marital counselling to a theoretical framework (Maxwell, 1971; Knox & Patrick, 1971; Glendening & Wilson, 1972), so it is not clear why or how the treatment should bring about change.

2) With the exception of the study by Glendening and Wilson (1977), the methods of pre-marital treatment are not stated in enough detail to allow replication by other practitioners.

3) The most commonly used method is the guest lecture approach (Rolfe, 1973; Holubeck and Holubeck, 1973; Holubeck, et al., 1974; the British Columbia Pastoral Institute, 1974). With this method various professionals: ministers, lawyers, psychologists, nurses, social workers, give a series of talks on various aspects of marriage such as law, communications, sexuality, and conflict resolution. The major problem with this approach is that there is a certain amount of inconsistency built into the program as different lecturers are used in the program over time. There is also the possibility that different lecturers within the same program will present either inconsistent views of marriage and/or there may be unnecessary repetition.

The following pre-marital program was designed to overcome the above problems.

<u>The Operant-Interpersonal Approach</u>

Stuart and Stuart (1975, p. 1) state that:

> It is possible that the process of courtship may covertly foster certain misunderstandings and faulty expectations, which, after marriage, become the course of intense conflict. This would happen if either or both spouses were capricious. But it can also happen as a result of incomplete or inaccurate communication about basic attitudes and expectations for giving and receiving in the various aspects of marital interaction.

Based on the above premise, a six session pre-marital course was developed. The treatment is designed to be used with from six

to nine couples in a small group setting, although it could be easily modified for use with individual couples.

Before the participants begin the course, they are requested to complete and return the Pre-Marital Inventory (Stuart & Stuart, 1975). This inventory is designed to gather valuable information regarding "basic discrepancies in attitudes and expectations, in assessing each partner's understanding of the other's position, and in providing data useful for accommodating each other's position," (Stuart & Stuart, 1975, p. 1). The other important feature of the inventory is that it helps to begin to socialize the couples into the treatment by asking questions in a manner that is consistent with the model that is developed in the course.

A model of a positively oriented relationship utilizing the reciprocity of specific positive behaviors is developed during the course (Stuart, 1969a, 1969b, 1973). The lessons presented in each session serve as sequential components in the development of this model. A typical format used in the lessons is as follows: the leader would first demonstrate the appropriate behavior, then each couple would try the behavior in an experimental exercise, followed by group discussion. Homework assignments are used to help transfer the learning that takes place in the sessions to the couple's natural

environment. Each session is started by going over the homework assignments which also serves as a means for reviewing the previous week's lesson.

The Operant-Interpersonal Pre-Marital Course

The operant interpersonal course consists of the following:

Session I	Introduction
Session II	Non-Verbal Behaviors
Session III	Unrevealed Differences, Decision Making and the Change First Principle
Session IV	Making Latent Contracts Manifest
Session V	Sexuality
Session VI	Conclusion: Summary and Evaluation

A detailed lesson plan for each session follows:

Session I: Introduction

1. The leader welcomes the participants, introduces himself or herself to the group, and then presents the goals of the course. The goals of the course are that each participant should:

    a. Learn to state explicitly and specifically their expectations for themselves, for their intended spouse, and for their marriage.

    b. Learn how to become solution rather than problem oriented.

    c. Learn how to request change positively and specifically.

    d. Learn how to negotiate and compromise.

    e. Learn how to form a viable and workable marriage contract.

2. Exercise: Introduce your fiance(e) to the group.

   Each person is to introduce their fiance(e) to the group by stating four specific positive behaviors they like about that person. The group leader begins the exercise by modeling the appropriate behavior. For example, "_____ shows consideration" is not specific. "_____shows consideration by listening patiently to my problems" is specific. The group members are provided with writing paper which they may use to help organize their thoughts.

   After five minutes, the leader goes around the group and asks each person to introduce their fiance(e) to the group by stating four specific positives about their fiance(e).

   Point: The point of this exercise is to begin to emphasize the importance of positive behavioral specificity.

3. Exercise: The Classified Ad - Ideal Husband and Ideal Wife.

   Each person is asked to write, anonymously, a classified advertisement that would appear in whatever newspaper they read.

   They are to write an advertisement for themselves as an ideal husband if they are a man and an ideal wife if they are a woman. They are told that they will not be reading what they wrote and to feel free to be quite fanciful and boastful.

   When they have finished, the leader has them fold their papers in half and then re-distributes them so that no one receives the paper that he or she wrote. The men are each asked to read the description of the ideal husband which they have received, and the women are each asked to read the description of the ideal wife which they have received.

   Point: The point of this exercise is to help each person begin to look at and share the expectations they have of themselves and of each other as husbands and wives in the marriage.

4. Assignment: Caring Behaviors

   The assignment which they are to do at home, is to write down four caring behaviors that they can do for their fiance(e) to show him or her that they care for them This is called a "caring list."

For example, I have a tendency to overcommit my time. Consequently, I don't have time to do some of the things I enjoy doing. Barbara will often suggest that I plan for some unplanned time. By helping me set aside time to "putter around," an activity Barbara knows I enjoy, she is showing me that she cares for me.

The participants are reminded that next week's session will begin by going over their "Caring Lists".

5. The group leader gives a brief outline of the remaining sessions and asks for questions.

Session II: Non-Verbal Behaviors

1. Last Week's Assignment

   The assignment from last week was to list four caring behaviors. The leader goes around the room in round robin fashion asking each person to read their list and helps them to be positive and specific.

   Point: It is the small things that make or break a marriage. All marriages have bad things that happen, but good marriages are characterized by a ratio of at least four good for every bad.

2. You cannot not communicate.

   A man and a woman are sitting next to each other on an airplane. He wants to talk with her. She wants desperately to not talk with anyone in the world. What do they do?

   The above situation is role played by two of the group members with other participants suggesting how they could behave in that situation.

   The leader then explains the principle that you cannot not communicate.[1]

3. A man and a woman come to a party and immediately join different groups. What does that indicate about their relationship?

   Each person is asked to think about the above question and to write down their answer.

   The leader asks a number of people from the group how they responded to the question.

Point: There are no fixed rules for interpreting nonverbal behavior. The couple could be arguing or they could have a healthy independent relationship.

The important point is whether or not the couple agree on their behavior and how that agreement is worked out - it depends on how the couple has defined their relationship and if they both agree on that definition.

4. How will you announce your relationship to the world?

(a) I would like you to imagine that you and your fiance(e) are going to a party. What would you like to communicate about your relationship to the other people at the party? How would this be communicated non-verbally?

(b) What would you like your fiance(e) to communicate about your relationship to your parents? How would this be communicated non-verbally?

(c) What would you like to communicate about your relationship to his or her parents? How would this be communicated non-verbally?

(d) What would you like to communicate about your relationship with your fiance(e) to another single person when just the three of you are together? How would this be communicated?

Point: It takes two people to architect (define) a relationship. A great deal of this definitional process is done through the use of non-verbal communication. The definitional process includes both the way each person sees the relationship and the way he or she would like it to be.

5. Non-verbal Gestures and Postures:

What are the non-verbal gestures and postures that we use to indicate the following:

(a) You exist
(b) You Don't Exist
(c) You're important
(d) You're Not Important
(e) I Love You
(f) I Do Not Love You
(g) Thank You
(h) No Thank You

The leader goes around the group asking each person for examples of gestures and postures that indicate (a) through (h) above making a master list on the blackboard or on newsprint hung at the front of the room.

Point: These gestures and postures make up part of the non-verbal vocabulary that we use in our relationships.

If any of you have seen the movie "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe" you saw two people who were experts at using non-verbal negatives. (Allow five minutes for discussion.)

6. The importance of congruent and incongruent verbal and non-verbal behaviors is then illustrated and discussed through the following examples:

> It is very important that the verbal and non-verbal behavior go together. If the man says "Let's go to a movie," and sits down, takes his shirt off, opens up a bottle of beer and turns on the hockey game - that is an incongruent message.
>
> Of if she says,"Well I guess I don't care if we go out to dinner. I'll cook something here." And she opens up an old can of tinned spaghetti and serves it with crackers, that might indicate that she really did want to go out.

7. Assignment: Tracking behavior is important. It is one of the most important techniques that we can use in changing behavior. The group leader then gives an illustration of the use of tracking behavior.

A husband and his wife are arguing. She said that she never knew when to have dinner ready because he was never home on time. So he started keeping track of when he came home. It turned out that he came home at 6 o'clock every night except Wednesday evening when he worked overtime on reports. On the basis of this information (and they were not aware of it before) they were able to agree that they would have dinner at 7 o'clock. The point is that just keeping track of behavior helps to get a base line so you can see what is happening and what needs to be changed.

The assignment for next week is to expand your list of caring behaviors to include some of the positive non-verbal behaviors talked about tonight, i.e., existence, importance, caring, and commitment.

The list should have six to ten behaviors listed down the left hand side of the page. Across the top write MTWTFSS for each day of the week. Then each night before you go to bed, place a check mark next to the caring behaviors that you performed during that day.

Session III: Unrevealed Differences, Decision Making and the Change First Principle

1. Make a list on the board of some of the verbal and non-verbal behaviors that the couples used to indicate existence, importance, caring, and commitment. Have each person state or estimate how often each behavior occurred. Then conduct a general discussion on their use of and evaluation of the technique of tracking behavior.

2. The Unrevealed Differences Test: How do they resolve the problem? How do they decide? What do they do?

   Each person completes The Unrevealed Differences Test. After filling out the form individually, the couples are asked to compare their answers question by question. They are to write A by the question if they agreed on the solution, and a D by the question if they disagreed.

   The leader states that disagreements are a part of any relationship, what is important is the strategies couples develop for solving disagreements. If there is not time to complete all of the questions, the rest may be assigned as homework.

   Points to get across during the discussion of the questions:

   In a win-win situation both partners obtain satisfaction by using compromise, negotiation, and creative problem solving.

   In a win-lose situation one person obtains satisfaction at the expense of the other in the short run. In the long run, the relationship may lose enough vitality as to no longer be desired by one or both partners.

   The importance of having a clear understanding of the time and activities that the couple will share and time and activities that each person will do separately.

Each person is given the handout on Models of Unsuccessful and Successful Decision-Making Authority[2] and the handout is discussed.

3. Assignment: The Change First Principle[3]

The change first principle states that in order to change another person or your relationship with that person you must change your own behavior first.

The change first principle can be applied to improving an already good relationship. Each person is asked to list three things that they could do for their fiance(e) during the next week that would improve their relationship. These are to be behaviors that are not now occurring or could happen more often. The group leader models the use of the change first principle.

The group leader then goes around the room in round robin fashion and asks each person to name one of the things that they will do for their fiance(e) during the next week.

Each person is also asked to list three specific positive requests that their fiance(e) could do for them. This is called "A Request List". The idea behind request lists and caring lists is to develop an increasingly rich menu of behaviors that each person can choose from in pleasing the other.

THE UNREVEALED DIFFERENCES TEST:
HOW DO THEY RESOLVE THE PROBLEM?
WHAT DO THEY DECIDE? WHAT DO THEY DO?

1. John and Mary both work. Mary wants John to do the dishes each night after dinner. John thinks working and taking care of the yard and their cars is enough. How do they resolve the problem?

2. Mary wants to go on a holiday to Hawaii with just her and John. John wants them to take their three children and go to Disneyland in California. What do they do?

3. John has a chance for a promotion, but it would mean moving to Dawson Creek. If they move Mary would loose her job (a job usually found only in larger cities). What do they do?

4. John wants to eat dinner while watching the evening news. Mary wants to eat dinner while listening to soft background music. How do they resolve the problem?

5. John and Mary have had a fight. He would like to make up but is waiting for her to make the first move. She would like to make up but is waiting for him to make the first move. How is the problem resolved?

6. When John comes home from work he likes to read the paper for half an hour to relax. Mary feels slighted. What do they do?

7. Mary wants to buy a color T.V. on credit. John doesn't feel that buying on credit is right. What do they do?

8. John wants Mary to go with him to the hockey game this Sunday at the Colosseum. Mary wants John to go with her this Sunday to see the ballet at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Where do they do?

9. It's Wednesday night. John has come home dead beat from work. They have a date to go to a movie with another couple. John would really like to stay home and rest. Mary has been looking forward to going out all day. What do they do?

10. It's Friday evening. John wants to go to the pub with the boys. Mary wants them to have friends over. What do they do?

11. John and Mary are both invited to the home of their respective parents for Christmas. Whose parents home do they go to?

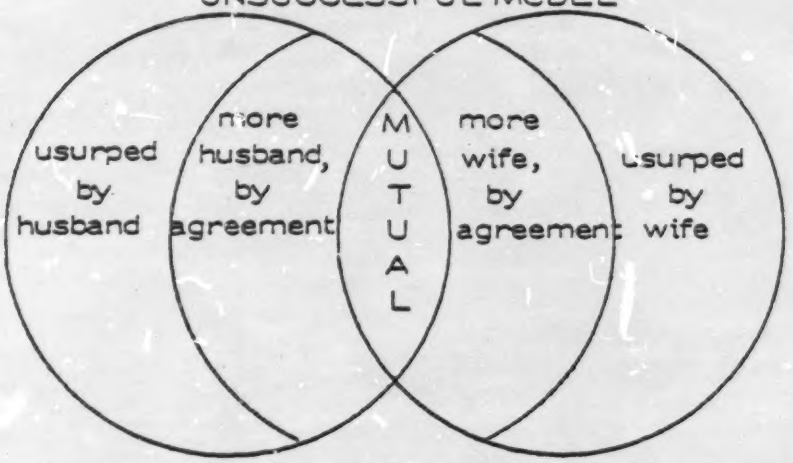
12. John and Mary are both looking forward to going camping over the long weekend. John thinks he may be getting sick. Mary says that they should stay home (she doesn't want John to be sick for work). John says that they will go (he doesn't want to disappoint Mary). What do they do?

13. John and Mary both work, their middle child is sick. Who stays home?

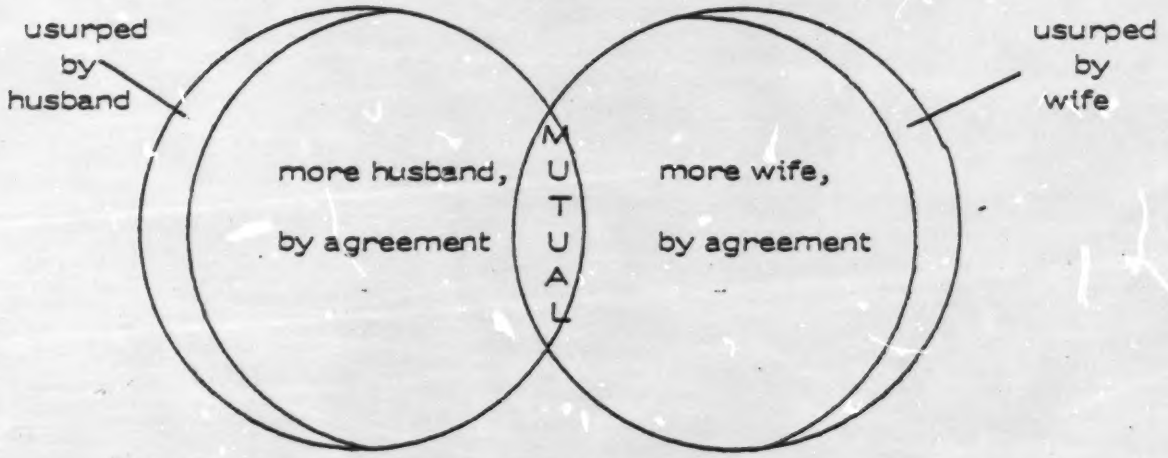
14. John works. Mary keeps house. Mary doesn't feel she is an equal partner because she doesn't have half the say in where the income goes. How do they resolve the problem?

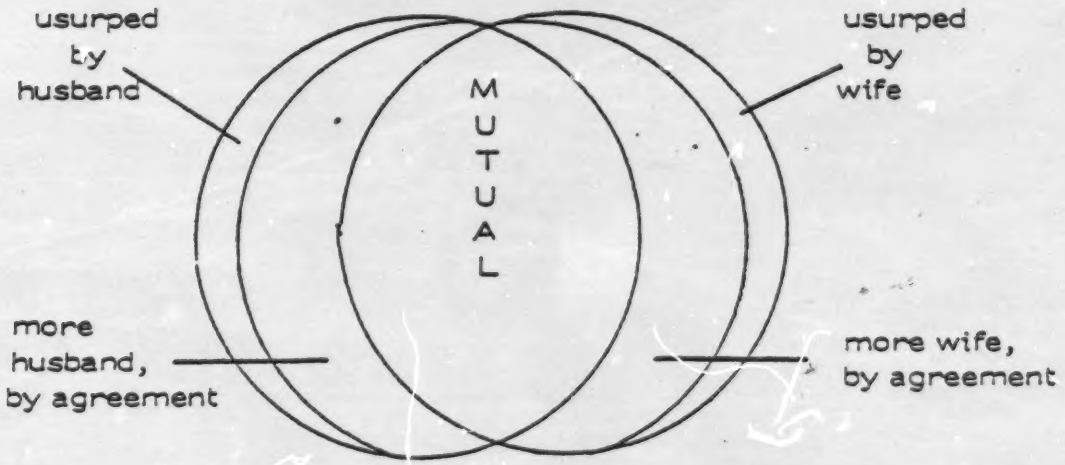
MODELS OF UNSUCCESSFUL AND SUCCESSFUL DIVISIONS OF DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY

UNSUCCESSFUL MODEL



SUCCESSFUL MODELS





Session IV: Making Latent Contracts Manifest

1. Go over the homework assignments

   List three things that each person did in the last week for their fiance(e). Note or estimate requests that were fulfilled, and have the group differentiate between requests and demands.

2. Exercise: The Prerogatives of Husbands and Wives

   Each person is to write (A) the three most basic prerogatives (prior or exclusive right or privilege) of husbands and (B) the three most basic prerogatives of wives.

   Point: This is important because we have an internalized set of role expectations. When our expectations are not met we feel violated. This can be related to last week's discussion on disagreements, negotiations, compromise and decision making.

3. Exercise: Shared and Private Goals for Next Month, Next Year, and Five Years from now.

   The group leader first models the behavior for the task. Then each person fills in one or two goals for each category on the form. When they have finished, each person is asked to place a star next to the shared goals that he wrote that he thinks will also appear on his fiance(e)'s list of shared goals. The leader goes around the room in round robin fashion and asks each person to read from their private and shared goals for next month, next year, or five years from now.

   Points: Making shared goals and private goals or shared time and private time explicit can help prevent arguments about time and resources in a relationship.

   Shared goals, both current and future, serve to strengthen a relationship.

4. Exercise: The Marriage Contract

   Each person is to fill out parts one, two and three of the marriage contract. The leader will go around the room in round robin fashion and ask individuals to read from parts one, two or three of their contract. The remaining parts of the contract will be assigned as homework.

SHARED AND PRIVATE GOALS

Goals may include interests you have now but would like to do more of, eg. going for a walk several times per week, or new interests you would like to develop, eg., one or both take up back packing. Goals may also include things you would like to have or accomplish, eg., having children, buying a house, or travelling to Europe.

List four specific goals you have for your relationship for next month (shared time).

a _____
b _____
c _____
d _____

List four specific goals you have for yourself for next month (private time).

a _____
b _____
c _____
d _____

List four shared goals you have for your relationship for next year.

a _____
b _____
c _____
d _____

List four private goals you have for yourself for next year.

a _____
b _____
c _____
d _____

List four shared goals you have for your relationship five years from now.

a _____
b _____
c _____
d _____

List four private goals you have for yourself five years from now.

a _____
b _____
c _____
d _____

THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT

If you were going to make a legal contract with your fiance(e) for the next five to ten years, what would the terms of the contract be regarding:

1. Work and career development
2. money
3. in-laws
4. shared time and private time
5. (Same sex, opposite sex) friends
6. affection and sex
7. children, and
8. where you live and the type of accommodation in which you reside.

The contract should be written in eight sections, one section for each of the eight areas listed above:

1.

2.

3.

Session V: Sexuality

1. What did you learn by completing the Marriage Contract from the previous session? (Allow five minutes for discussion.)

2. Images of Male and Female

   (a) ask each man to write down three words that describe how he sees what it is to be male and then write down three words for what it is to be female.

   (b) ask each woman to write down three words that describe how she sees what it is to be female and then write down three words for what it is to be male.

   Each person then hands in his list and the leader and several volunteers make a master list on the board which can be discussed in the group.

3. Forbidden Topics

   Ask each person to make an anonymous list of aspects that they would be least likely to tell or talk about with their partner about sex.

   Collect and make a list collage of the verboten on the board. (Allow time for discussion.)

4. Attitudes toward Sex

   Each participant is instructed to complete the sex attitude scale from the Sex Attitude Inventory (Stuart, Stuart, Maurice & Szasz, 1975). Next, each couple is instructed to compare their answers for each item and compute the numerical difference between their answers. This number squared is the difference score for that couple on that particular item.

   The scale is made up of three subscales. Part 1 (questions 1, 4, 7, 10) is concerned with people's acceptance of the social basis of sex. Part II (questions 2, 5, 8, 11) is concerned with situational aspects of sex. And Part III (questions 3, 6, 9, 12) is concerned with conventional stereotypes toward sex. At this point the couples can compute their score for each of the three subscales by adding up their difference scores for the four items in each subscale.

   The difference scores for each subscale are handed in anonymously and the distribution placed on the board. The lower a couples difference score, the less their attitudinal predispositions to sex will be a problem for them. Any question on which there is a scaler difference of two or more is an area of potential conflict.

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE CONCERNED WITH SOME OF YOUR ATTITUDES TOWARD SEX. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS.
Please indicate your answer by drawing an "X" over the number corresponding to the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly Agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree
1. Couples may be able to have good sex even though they usually do not get along well together in other ways.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Partners who often see each other nude experience increased intimacy and sexual excitement.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Men usually need more sex and want a greater variety of sex than women.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Partners should know what each other enjoys about sex without having to ask or to tell.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Sex should be enjoyable any time of the night or day, in any place that is private.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Thinking about sex with other partners is an indication of a poor sexual relationship with the present partner.	1	2	3	4	5
7. If a man has a problem responding sexually, he and not the couple should receive help.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Keeping the lights on during sex often helps the couple to increase pleasure.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Oral-genital sex is a perfectly acceptable part of love making.	1	2	3	4	5
10. There are times when one partner might help the other to experience pleasure even though he or she may not have chosen that experience at that time.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Couples can improve their pleasure by talking during intercourse.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Pornography tells modern couples more about sex than does the Bible.	1	2	3	4	5

Point: It is necessary to negotiate areas of difference. Well functioning couples are couples who have been able to talk about what they would like to have different in their love-making and then to negotiate these differences.

Two books in the area of sexuality then recommended: The Joy of Sex, by Alex Comfort, and Understanding Human Sexual Inadequacy, by Belliveau and Richtler. Both books are then passed around the group.

5. Exercise:

Each person is to write their fantasy, while being completely selfish and self-indulgent, of what an ideal evening with their fiance(e) would be like for them. They then compare fantasies and make a compromise fantasy which is to be maximally pleasing for both parties.

Session VI: Conclusion: Summary and Evaluation

1. Summary:

The group leader gives a summary of the major points from each session in the course and states the goals of the operant-interpersonal approach to pre-marital counselling. The leader then asks the participants if they have any questions from previous sessions, if there are other issues that have come up, or if they have any current concerns.

2. Evaluations:

All of the participants are asked to evaluate the course on the Course Evaluation Form. After they have finished completing the form, questions 20, 21, 22, and 23 are discussed followed by a general discussion on their evaluation of the course.

COURSE EVALUATION FORM

Part I.

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR ANSWER BY MAKING A CIRCLE AROUND THE NUMBER CORRESPONDING TO THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH EACH STATEMENT.

	Strongly Agree		Neutral		Strongly Disagree
1. I enjoyed what I experienced in the course.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The course influenced me in my present relationship with my fiance(e).	1	2	3	4	5
3. The content of the course will influence me in our marriage.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I would recommend that my friends take this course.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I found it easy to participate in the sessions.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I felt that the group leader(s) understood me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My fiance(e) and I talked about our experiences in the sessions during the week.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I understood the objectives of the course.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I applied the concepts from the sessions in my interactions during the week.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I feel that the preparation for marriage course I have just taken should be made mandatory by the province.	1	2	3	4	5

/...2

Page 2. Course Evaluation Form.

Part II.

HOW HELPFUL WERE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING. (Please circle NP if you were not present).

		Very Helpful		Neutral		Not very Helpful	
11.	The introductory session	1	2	3	4	5	NP
12.	The discussion on communications	1	2	3	4	5	NP
13.	The discussion on decision making.	1	2	3	4	5	NP
14.	The discussion on conflict resolution.	1	2	3	4	5	NP
15.	The discussion on goals.	1	2	3	4	5	NP
16.	The discussion on sexuality	1	2	3	4	5	NP
17.	The discussion on marriage contracts.	1	2	3	4	5	NP

18. Did you feel that the group sessions were:
    A. Too long
    B. Too short
    C. Just right.

19. Did you feel that the length of the course was:
    A. Too long
    B. Too short
    C. The right length.

20. Please list three ways in which participation in this course has changed your present interactions.

21. Please list three ways in which participation in the course may have changed the way you will interact in your marriage.

Page 3. Course Evaluation Form.

22. Please list three things that you liked about the course.

23. Please make three suggestions that you feel would improve the course.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. See Watzlawick "Pragmatics of Human Communication."

2. From R. B. Stuart, "Behavioral Remedies for Marital Ills - A Guide to the Use of Operant-Interpersonal Techniques," p. 251.

3. See Stuart & Lederer, "Caring Days," in press.

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